

ON BEHALF OF THE DIET TEACHER

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JUDGING from Miss Hitchcock's article relative to the New York state examinations, in the May number of the JOURNAL, it seems that the Board of Examiners is disposed to lay at least the greater part of the blame for the deplorable failure in the dietary examinations on the teachers of that subject.

The diet teachers, I am sure, must feel that this is not quite just and I would say a word on their behalf. I taught dietetics for two years in several hospitals and during that time, feeling very dissatisfied with the conditions I had to work under in the majority of them, I consulted some dietitians who had had a longer and more varied experience in the work than I. As the result, I found that there were comparatively few hospitals where the arrangements were such as would enable the nurses to gain an equal degree of knowledge of even the principles of dietetics as of their other studies.

The following are a few of the complaints that I received in answer to my inquiries:

In one hospital the nurses were given their instruction, which consisted of fourteen lessons, at night, toward the end of their senior year. At the same time, they were having a like number of lessons in massage, also at night. This made four nights a week that they were obliged to have classes of two hours' duration. As a natural consequence, they were too tired to be easily interested or in a retentive state of mind. Not more than half of these nurses had had or would have any practical experience, and those who had any, had it without the supervision of a competent instructor.

In another hospital, the instruction in dietetics, which consisted of sixteen lessons, was given in the probationary term. Each of the nurses expected to have two months' practical work in the diet kitchen, but this service came at any time during their training, sometimes even two years after their class work, and as there was no resident dietitian, the nurse who was serving her second month was given charge.

In a third hospital, where the nurses were given thirty lessons in anatomy and physiology and fourteen in dietary, the diet teacher was

asked to pay particular attention to the digestion of foods, etc., because the doctor who had given the lectures on physiology had failed to do so.

The majority of teachers, except in the hospitals where there was a preparatory course or a resident dietitian, complained of the few lessons given in dietetics compared to those of other subjects. In nearly all the hospitals about twice as many were given in anatomy and, as the teachers justly remarked, when the degree of knowledge necessary for a nurse to have of the two sciences is compared, there are a far greater variety of subjects to be considered in connection with dietary.

In the majority of hospitals it is not the superintendents of the schools who are to blame (they are usually as distressed as the diet teacher at the state of affairs), but neither, until such conditions are improved, is it the fault of the diet teacher that the pupils do not pass better examinations. The greater number of teachers, I know, require the pupils to memorize some of the recipes more important for a nurse to know, but when it is considered how much there is to teach and how much time is necessarily taken up with the practical lessons and putting things in order after those lessons, it is not to be wondered at that more cannot be accomplished in from twelve to sixteen sessions; especially when, as is usually the case where there is no resident dietitian, the lessons are not followed by quizzes or by practical work under the supervision of a competent instructor. It is only by carrying out recipes repeatedly that they will be remembered, and, if nurses are to remember the scientific rules that govern cooking, there must be some one at hand while they are on duty in the diet kitchen to quiz them while they work. If they are to remember the comparative quantities of food required for a given number of people, they must have practice in ordering supplies. If they are to be able, and how necessary it is, to vary invalid's diet or the meals in institutions, especially where money is scarce, there must be some one to encourage them to search the recipe book for, and to try, new recipes. Then, there must not be too much drudgery in connection with the work in the diet kitchen, the pupils' interest must be constantly stimulated, and the importance of their work impressed upon them.

Thus, and thus only, will sixteen lessons serve their purpose. Without such practical instruction, time and money spent on such a limited number of lessons are, except for students who have had some previous training in cooking, time and money lost.